

Al- Wasatiyyah: A Distinctive Feature of Islam

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Abstract

Wasatiyyah or Moderation is one of the main characteristics of Islam and Muslim Ummah. Islam is the only religion which talks about the life of this world and the hereafter in a moderate and proper way. It strikes a balance between the requirements of spirit and the requirements of material, or between human materialism and spiritualism.

This is moderate nature of Islam that the concept of moderation exists in Islamic epistemology from all perspectives, inclusive of principles, essentials, doctrines, dogmas, creed, worship, morality, worldview and practice. In other words, the concept of moderation is explicit in the Qur'ān with unique styles, explaining the good and evil, righteousness and viciousness and its advantages for the Muslim community and humanity as a whole. There are also Prophetic Traditions that emphasize the method of moderation, its features and its need in the individual and collective Muslim life.

This paper will discuss the concept of wasatiyyah, and its significance in Islam; and secondly, it will analyze its basic features and characteristics in the light of holy Quran and Sunnah.

This study will use the method of document analysis to discuss the matter in composite and as a qualitative research an exploratory and descriptive design using the content analysis method will be applied.

Key words: Islam, concept, feature, *al-wasatiyyah*, moderation, justice, straightness, extremism, negligence

Introduction

Deriving from the Arabic word *wasata*, Muslim scholars use the term *Wasatiyyah* to refer to the concept of Moderation¹ in Islam. According to the Muslim belief, Allah almighty revealed the Qur'ān for man's guidance whose aim is to liberate him from the darkness of ignorance to illuminate light of Truth, thus requiring him to apply the method of moderation as the significant source and essence of guidance in all walks of life. According to Muslim religious thinkers and Qur'ānic commentators, moderation is not confined to partial implementation or enforcement of Islamic religious teachings or rulings or systems but it is a comprehensive method to be applied in every aspect of life by every individual or group or nation. Indeed, Islam is entirely based on the method of moderation that is explicit from the discourses conducted by Muslim scholars based on the Qur'ān and Prophetic Traditions. The need and modality of the concept of moderation are referred to in the Qur'ān in a number of places in relation to creed, acts of devotion, confession, legal rulings, commanding good and forbidding evil, struggle in the cause of Allah, human relations and morality, acquisition of wealth and its expenditure and accountability of the soul and its passions.

An overview of Islamic teachings portrays that the concept of moderation exists in Islam from all perspectives, inclusive of principles, essentials, doctrines, dogmas, creed, worship, morality, worldview and practice. In other words, the concept of moderation is explicit in the Qur'ān with unique styles, explaining the good and evil, righteousness and viciousness and its advantages for the Muslim community and humanity as a whole. There are also Prophetic Traditions that emphasize the method of moderation, its features and its need in the individual and collective Muslim life.

¹ The term, 'moderation', is used in the West for *al-wasatiyyah*, though it is not a perfect alternative.

Qur'ānic Concept of *Wasatiyyah*

The Word *Wasat*

Al-wasatiyyah is an Arabic term originating from the word *wasat*. Actually, this term was taken and elaborated from the word *ummatan wasaṭan* (the moderate nation), which is found in the exhortation of Allah almighty:

“Thus, We have made of you an Ummat justly balanced (*ummatan wasaṭan*), that ye might be witnesses over the nations and the Messenger a witness over yourselves...”² In this verse, Allah almighty explains that the Islamic people are *ummatan wasaṭan*.

The word ‘*wasat*’ has two expressions; first is *wasat* (/vəsət/) with the vowel sound ‘ə’ denoted by the symbol (َ) of the middle letter and it is a noun. Sometimes, in Arabic, it is used as an adjective that remains always singular whether its noun is singular or plural and feminine or masculine. Another expression is *wasṭ* (/vəst/) with diacritical marks (ِ) on the middle letter. This is the adverb of place and has the meaning of among and between. Al-Aṣḥāhānī defines the second word as a place that is located in the middle of equal length around it. His definition was supported by Ibn Fāris, Ibn Manzūr, al-Zubedī, al-Muṭrizī, and al-Fuyūmī.³

Al-Aṣḥāhānī further says ‘*Wasatiyyah*’ comes from that the difference between the above-mentioned two words is that the first one is used for the middle point of a single thing that has two ends while the second one is used for the thing in the center of many things.⁴ The first one is oftentimes used in the Arabic language with different substances which are very close to each other in their implications.

Regarding the different meanings, the word *wasat* has been defined as follows:

1. The middle point of a thing that has two ends. It is said, for example, “*qabaztu wasat al-ḥabli*” in Arabic Language which means I had held the rope in the exact middle.⁵
2. Something between the good and bad. Here the meaning of *wasat* is metaphor against the bad things rather than good things. For instance, in a section of the ḥadīth narrated by Abdullah ibn Mu’āwiyah al-Ghāḍirī, that the Prophet (peace be upon him) says: “but of the medium (*wasat*) of your possessions because Allah almighty neither asks you for the best one nor orders the worst one.”⁶
3. Between the two sides which are equally defective. For example, generous among stingy and spendthrift. This meaning is advocated by al-Aṣḥāhānī.⁷

² Al-Baqarah, 2:143.

³ Husain ibn Moḥammad al-Aṣḥāhānī, *Al-Mufradāt fi Gharīb al-Qur’ān* (Beirut: Dar al-M’arifa li al-Ṭaba’ wa al-Nashr, n.d.), 523. Al-Maktabah al-Shāmilāh, V. 3.61.; *Mu’jam al-Maqāis al-Lughah*, s.v. “Wasat”; *Lisan al-Arab*, 1st ed., s.v. “Wasat”; *Tāj al-Urūs min Jawāhir al-Qāmūs*, s.v. “Wasat”; *Al-Mughrab fi al-Tarīb al-M’urab*, “1st ed., s.v. “Wasat”; *Al-Misbah al-Munir fi Gharīb al-Sherh al-Kabir*, s.v. “Wasat.”

⁴ Al-Aṣḥāhānī, 523.

⁵ *Lisān al-Arab*, s.v. “Wasat.”

⁶ Abū Dāwūd Sulemān ibn Ash’as al-Sijastānī, *Sunan Abu Dawūd* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, n.d.), 2: 15, [1584]. Al-Maktabah al-Shāmilāh, V. 3.61.

⁷ Al-Aṣḥāhānī, 522.

4. Justice and fairness. The Prophet (peace be upon him) referred to ‘*wasat*’ in the verse “Ummatan wasaṭan” as ‘justice’. Ḥaḍrat S’aid Khudrī has narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) explained the word ‘*wasat*’ as ‘*‘adl*’ (justice).⁸

5. Being the best. Ibn Kathīr, the prominent commentator of the Qur’ān, interprets the word ‘*wuṣṭā*’ in the verse 238 of al-Baqarah: “Be guardians of your prayers, and of the midmost [*wuṣṭā*] prayer, and stand up with devotion to Allah”,⁹ as being ‘the best’.¹⁰ And there are many famous proverbs where Arabs have used the word ‘*wasat*’ in the meaning of ‘the best’. This definition is likewise endorsed by al-Jawharī.¹¹

6. It also means **straightness**. The author of *Lisān al-Arab* has narrated a story of a Bedouin who asks Abū S’aid to teach him a straight faith which has neither excess and exaggeration nor negligence and rejection. Here the Bedouin has used the word *wasūt* for the meaning of straight. Besides, a prominent commentator of the holy Qur’ān has explained *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* (straight path) in the Qur’ānic verse “*Ihdanā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*”¹² as a middle path (*al-ṭarīq-al-wasat*)¹³.

Thus, it can be concluded that the meaning of the term *wasat* refers to the middle, intermediate, justice, fairness, best, and straightness.

The term *Wasatiyyah*

Wasatiyyah or Moderation is an approved way that forbids a soul to work towards two disliked poles of excess (*ifrāt*) and negligence (*tafrīt*) but it is to keep the balanced and middle path between two contradictory sides without cutting through the boundaries of any position.

Abdul Reḥmān Audā defines *wasatiyyah* as to hold moderate and just position between two contradictory things. Some of these contradictions are materialism and spirituality, idealism and realism, individuality and collectivity, reasoning and revelation, and *ijtihād* verse the explicit dictum.¹⁴

This definition is supported by al-Qaradāwī. According to him, *wasatiyyah* means being middle or just between two conflicting positions, with no inclination to one of them to deny the right of the others.¹⁵

⁸ Muḥammad ibn Ismā’īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, eds. Muṣṭafā Dīb al-Bughā, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1987), 4: 1632, [4217]; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal al-Sheḥānī, *Musnad Aḥmad*, edis. Al-Sayyid Abū al-Mu’āṭī al-Nūrī (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1998), 3: 32, [11291]; Abū ‘Isā al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi* (Beirut: Dar Iḥyā al-Turās al-Arabī, n.d.), 5: 207, [2961]. Al-Maktabah al-Shāmilāh, V. 3.61.

⁹ Al-Baqarah, 2:238

¹⁰ Hafiz ‘Imaduddīn Abul Fidā Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, Trans. Muḥannā Moḥammad Jūnāgarī (Lahore: Maktaba Quddūsiya, 2006), 1: 344.

¹¹ *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ fī al-Lughah*, s.v. “Wasat.”

¹² Al-Fatiha, 1:8.

¹³ Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-‘Imādi Abū S’aid, *Tafsīr Abu S’aid*, (Beirut: Dar Iḥyā at-Turās al-‘Arabī, n.d.), 1: 18. Al-Maktabah al-Shāmilāh, V. 3.61.

¹⁴ ‘Abdul Reḥmān ‘Audāh, *Al-Islām Dīn al-Wasatiyyah* (Riyāḍ: Maktabah al-Shāmilāh, V. 3.61), 4.

¹⁵ Dr. Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī, *Islām kā Nazriya I’tidāl or uske Aḥam ‘Anāsir*, trans. Ilyās N’omānī (New Delhi: IFA Publications, 2014), 7.

Muḥammad Mustaqīm defines *wasatīyyah* as a middle path approach, which means performing obligations and duties in a moderate, balanced, and fair in line with the requirements of religion as Islam is very concerned with comprehensive balance and moderation in all aspects of life.¹⁶

Some scholars like Farīd Abdul Qādir have criticized the above definitions. He says *wasatīyyah* is not as it is highlighted a middle point between the two ends or two poles, or between two extreme positions. For example, justice is an aspect of moderation, although it has one only opposite side; that is tyranny. However, he agrees with the second condition and defines the term *wasatīyyah* as fairly and justly balanced.¹⁷

In contrast, the author of *al-Wasatīyyah fī Zaw al Qur'ān*, Naṣir bin Sulaimān al-Umer, writes that one who wishes to comprehend the in-depth meaning and application of moderation finds it essential that moderation fulfills two criteria: (1) justice and excellence (*adl* and *khayriyyah*) and (2) between or the middle (*bayniyyah*), whether it is apparent or implied.¹⁸

Therefore, anything, which features *wasatīyyah*, must hold these two conditions, but on the contrary, a thing that keeps the meaning of being the best or is in the middle of things is not necessarily on the principle of *wasatīyyah*. For instance, in the verse, '*ummātan wasaṭan*' the Prophet (peace be upon him) explained the word '*wasat*' as '*adl*' (justice) and the inverse of the justice is tyranny which has two positions; if a judge becomes partial to any of the two parties that is the tyranny while the justice is in between.

Imām Ibn Taymiyyah has explained it much better way. He writes that Islam as a religion is the midpoint among all other faiths. The Muslims believe in the messengers of Allah in a moderate way. For example, they do not go to extremes in their beliefs about the Prophets as the Christians do, about whom the holy Qur'ān says: "They took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords besides Allah and (they also took as their Lord) Messiah, son of Maryam (Mary)."¹⁹ nor the Muslims put the messengers at such a low status, as do the Jews about which Allah almighty says: "and they killed the Prophets unjustly."²⁰ The Muslims always stand in the middle when it comes to all matters of *Deen*.²¹

One of the Prophetic traditions (ḥadīth) also gives a well-defined sense of both of the conditions of *wasatīyyah*.

Abdullāh ibn Mu'āwiyah al-Ghādirī reported the Prophet (peace be upon him) as saying: "He who performs three things will have the taste of Īmān. (They are :) One who worships Allah alone and one believes that there is no god but Allah; and one who pays the zakāh (alms) on his property agreeably every year. One should not give an aged animal, nor one suffering from itch or ailing, and one most

¹⁶ Mazlān Ibrāhīm, Jaffary Awang et al., *Wasatiyyah Discourse according to Muslim Scholars in Malaysia*, *Advances in Natural and Applied Sciences* 71, no 1 (2013), 6-14.

¹⁷ Dr. Alī Muḥammad al-Ṣalābī, *Al-Wasatīyyah fī al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, (Beirūt: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), 30.

¹⁸ Naṣir bin Sulaimān al-Umer, *Al-Wasatīyyah fī Zaw al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Maktabah al-Shāmilah, V. 3.61), 39.

¹⁹ Al-Tawbāh, 10: 31.

²⁰ Āle-ʿImrān, 3: 112.

²¹ Aḥmad ibn ʿAbdul Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyyah, *Iqtizā al-Ṣirāt al-Mustaqīm*, eds. Nāṣir ʿAbdul Karīm al-ʿAql, (Beirūt: Dār ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1999), 3: 6. Al-Maktabah al-Shāmilāh, V. 3.61.

condemned, but one should give animals of medium quality, for Allah did not demand from you the best of your animals, nor did He command you to give the animals of worse quality.”²²

The condition, ‘between’, is clearly understood and ‘justice and excellence’ could also be understood with a bit ponder over the text of the ḥadīth. As in the ḥadīth, the demand is to give middle one of the best and worst quality and that is beneficial to both, receiver (poor) and giver (wealthy).

The prominent Muslim scholar, Rashīd Riḍā, also considers these conditions in his definition of ‘*wasat*’ in the verse 143 of al-Baqara.²³

Important Features of *Wasatīyyah*

The word *wasat* or *wasatīyyah* is less used in the Qur’ān and the Ḥadīth but some other terms are found in the sacred sources and each one of them holds one of the features of *wasatīyyah*. While studying these features one could see them very similar to *wasatīyyah*. Some of those foremost significant features are as under here with a brief account:

Excellence and Goodness (*al-Khayriyyah*):

The first feature of moderation is excellence or goodness. This is substantiated by a verse in which Allah mentions that Muslims are the ‘middle nation’ (*Ummatan wasatan*). Thus, in the other verse Muslims are described as the ‘best community’ (*Khayra Ummah*). It is explicit from the verses of the Qur’ān that one of the meanings or propositions of moderation is excellence or goodness (*khayriyyah*). In this context, Ibn Kathīr propounds that ‘middle’ refers to the ‘best’ and ‘excellent’.

In his explanation, he further argues that the Arabic term *Khayra Ummah* implies the best of people for mankind; the best for and among nations; and the beneficial for mankind.²⁴ Al-Ṭabarī claims that elucidation of verse 110 of Āl ‘Imrān is that this Muslim community is among the best of nations that had gone before.²⁵

Furthermore, he propounds that the ‘middle’ stated in the Qur’ān refers to ‘justice’ and its meaning is ‘the best’ because the best people among the nations are those who maintain justice.²⁶ It is explicit from the illustration that ‘excellence or best or goodness’ is interpreted as moderation which Allah mentions among the features and characteristics of this Muslim community. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā highlights that this Muslim community is not regarded as the best among mankind unless it upholds the mission of propagating good and forbidding evil.²⁷ In interpreting the verse 110 of Āl ‘Imrān: “You are the best community brought forth [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and believe in Allah. If only the People of the Scripture had believed, it would have been better for them. Among them are believers, but most of them are defiantly disobedient.”, al-Tirmidhī, a compiler of Prophetic Traditions, remarks that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said that Muslims are

²² Abu Dāwūd, 2:15 [1584].

²³ Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-M’arifah, n.d.), 2: 4

²⁴ Ibn Kathīr, 1: 231.

²⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, 7: 104.

²⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, 3: 141.

²⁷ Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār* (Cairo: Al-Heya al-Misriyyah al-‘Āmmah li al-Kitāb, 1990), 4: 47.

one among seventy nations; they are the best of them and the most honorable of them in the sight of Allah.²⁸

This statement implicitly implies that Muslims are required to be moderate in all circumstances and situations and not otherwise; if they are immoderate then they are not recognized as the best in the sight of Allah.

The preceding discourse explains that the phenomenon of excellence or best or goodness of the Muslim community that Allah has made is the community of justice. The scholars integrate the meanings of excellence or the best or goodness and moderation to the extent that one becomes complementary to another in terms of explanation.

Justice (*al-Adl*):

The second feature of moderation is justice (*al-adl*). There are numerous interpretations of the scholars (*Mufissirin*) on the '*wasat*' in the verse 143 of *al-Baqarah*: "Thus have We made of you an *ummah* (community) justly balanced (*wasatan*), that ye might be witnesses over the nations, and the Messenger a witness over yourselves...", that refers it to justice. Al-Qurtubī remarks that 'middle' here refers to 'justice' and commendable of all things is its 'equitableness.' He adds that the Muslim community will not witness except justice and will not enforce the words of others on others, except that they are just.²⁹ Ibn Kathīr interprets that it (middle) refers to upholding the truth for the sake of Allah and not for the sake of the people and be witnesses to fair dealings which means with justice. None should abandon justice for it is obligatory on every individual, in all places, circumstances and time.³⁰

The Prophet (peace be upon him) himself referred to '*wasat*' in the verse as 'justice'. Ḥaḍrat Sa'īd Khudrī has narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) explained the word '*wasat*' as '*adl*' (justice).³¹

Further, al-Qaraḍāwī argues that justice is the basic characteristic for a witness to accept his evidence in Islam otherwise it will be rejected. The just witness and the just decision both are commonly accepted by the people. He defines the term '*adl*' as holding the middle position between two or more opposite groups, without inclining to any one of them. In other words, it means to solve disputes in such a way that every party gets its due.³²

This term also refers to impartiality, fairness, equitableness, probity, honesty, uprightness, equitable composition or just composition.³³ One who observes moderation, according to Islam, is expected to have all these attributes. In other words, when one advocates moderation, he should take into account these aspects comprehensively.

Commenting on verse 58 of *al-Nisā'*: "Surely Allah commands you to make over trusts to those worthy of them, and that when you judge between people, you judge with justice. Surely Allah admonishes you with what is excellent. Surely Allāh is ever Hearing, Seeing.", Maudūdi opines that the verse implicitly

²⁸ Al-Tirmidhī, 5: 226, [3001].

²⁹ Moḥammad bin Aḥmad Abu 'Abdullah al-Qurtubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, (Riyāḍ: Al-Maktabah al-Shāmilah, V.3.61.),2: 148.

³⁰ Ibn Kathīr, 1: 233.

³¹ Al-Bukhārī, 4: 1632, [4217]; Ahmad, 3: 32, [11291]; Al-Tirmidhī, 5: 207, [2961].

³² Dr. Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Kalimat fi al-Wasatīyyah al-Islamiya wa M'alimihā*, (Kuwait: International Moderation Center, 2011), 13.

³³ Lisān al-Arab, 1st ed., s.v. "Adl."

reflects not to entrust positions of responsibility and religious and political leadership to inefficient, incompetent, narrow-minded, immoral, dishonest and unjust people.

Muslims are enjoined to entrust positions of responsibility to only qualified and competent people of good moral character.³⁴

There are several other primary accounts explaining the need for upholding justice, which is nothing but one of the manifestations of applying the method of moderation in human relations at all levels according to Islamic Traditions.

Straightness (*al-Istiḳāmah*):

Many scholars have endorsed the term *al-istiḳāmah* as one of the significant features of moderation. According to al-Asfahānī, it refers to steadfast on the straight path as it has been described in the verse 30 of *al-fuṣṣilat*: “As for those who say, ‘Our lord is Allah; and then remain steadfast...’”³⁵

Al-Qurtabī, interprets that straightness refers to maintaining steadfastness in love for Allah and servitude to Him and not to turn away from it, either right or left.³⁶

Umar, the second Caliph of Islam (may Allah be pleased with him), is reported as saying that “straightness refers to maintaining the straight path in following Allah’s commandments (*amr*) and avoiding the prohibitions (*nahī*) and not dealing in fraudulent manners like dodging of foxes.”³⁷

The word *istiḳāmah* with its derived forms has mentioned numerous places in the Holy Qur’ān and the ḥadīth. The first chapter of the Holy Qur’ān, *al-Fātiḥah* (The Opening), consist the verse *Ihḍinā al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*. Here *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* means ‘the straightway’ or ‘the straight path’, which is also the middle position as compared to the crooked, winding or wrong paths surrounding it.

Here is also a ḥadīth on the topic, narrated by Abū Sa’īd, that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: “When the son of Adam wakes up in the morning, all of his body parts bow to the tongue and say: ‘Fear Allah regarding us, we are only part of you. If you are straight we are straight and if you are crooked we are crooked.’”³⁸

All this discourse unveils that straightness is strict observance of the straight path.

This implies that the path of Allah and His laws are followed strictly and sincerely without any reservation or refutation, addition or deletion or exaggeration or elimination. This is the essence of moderation which Ibn al-Qayyim states as “there is no straightness without moderation and no moderation without straightness.”³⁹

Wisdom (*al-Ḥikmah*):

³⁴ Abul A’alā Maudūdī, *Tafhīm al-Qur’ān* (Lahore: Idārah Tarjumān al-Qur’ān, n.d.), 1: 363.

³⁵ Al-Asfahānī, 554.

³⁶ Al-Qurtubī, 9: 91.

³⁷ Moḥammad bin Abū Bakar Ibn al-Qayyim al-Juwziyyah, *Madarij al-Salikin*, eds. Moḥammad Ḥamid al-Fiqqī, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-‘Arabiyyah, 1973), 2: 104. Al-Maktabah al-Shamilah, V. 3.61.

³⁸ Al-Tirmidhi, 4: 605, [2407].

³⁹ Ibn al-Qayyim, al-Jawziyyah, 2: 105.

Many Muslim scholars assert that wisdom is one of the main features of moderation. The Arabic term *ḥikmah*, used in the Qur'ān, means wisdom, justice, knowledge, reasoning, gentleness, prophet hood and the scripture of Allah.⁴⁰

According to al-Qurtubī, wisdom refers to an action that is desirable and suitable at a time which is appropriate.⁴¹

Abdul Reḥmān al-Sa'dī argues that wisdom refers to putting things in their appropriate places and keeping matters in accordance with their respective positions.⁴²

Here are examples from the Qur'ān which helps to understand the appropriateness and right position of the situation that the wisdom demands. In two different places in the Qur'ān, Allah almighty guides his Prophet: "And argue not with the People of the Book except by what is best, save such of them as act unjustly..."⁴³ "O Prophet, strive hard against the disbelievers and the hypocrites and be firm against them."⁴⁴

Both these instructions, dealing with non-believers, were given at the two different events as the situation was demanding.

Ibn al-Qayyim upholds that doing good deeds according to what has been commanded is wisdom. It refers to knowing the truth and action by it and ultimately proceeding forward with a proper goal in words and deeds. This is not possible, except with genuine understanding of the Qur'ān and Islamic jurisprudence and realization of faith. He also asserts that wisdom means to give everything its right, not to violate its limit, not to act earlier than the appointed time and not to delay or postpone its accomplishment.⁴⁵

The above discussed definitions in relation to wisdom unveils that it is necessary for it to follow the bounds which implies moderation. It requires strict observance of moderation and not affected by excessiveness or negligence; this is the essence of wisdom.

Ease and Removal of Hardship (*al-Yusr* and *Rafa al-Ḥarj*):

The foremost thing that penetrates our mind while discussing moderation is the true meaning and application of ease or facilitation and removal of hardship. This is the inevitable feature of *wasatīyyah* as Dr. Ṣāliḥ bin Ḥamīd, declares them unavoidable for *wasatīyyah*. He says that it refers to what man does without being afflicted by hardship and additional burden or trouble and without sacrificing what he possesses in terms of ability and effort and without pain.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Al-Asfahānī, 128.

⁴¹ Al-Qurtubī, 3: 313.

⁴² Abdul Reḥman bin Naṣir Al-Sa'dī, *Taisīr al-Laṭīf al-Mannān fī Khulāṣah Tafsīr al Qur'ān* (Riyāḍ: Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Call and Guidance, 1422 AH), 2:104. Al-Maktabah al-Shamilah, V. 3.61.

⁴³ Al-Ankabūt, 29: 46.

⁴⁴ Al-Tawbah, 10: 73.

⁴⁵ Al-Jawziyyah, 2: 479.

⁴⁶ Dr. Moḥammad Ṣāliḥ 'Abdullah ibn Ḥamīd, *Raf al-Ḥaraj fī al-Sharī'ah al-Islāmiyyah*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Istiḳāmah, 1412), 46.

According to Ibn Manẓūr, the Arabic term *al-yusr* refers to ease, relief, tenderness, flexibility, compliance and submission. It is the opposite of the Arabic term *al-usr* (difficulty, hardship).⁴⁷

Interpreting the verse 185 of al-Baqarah: “Allah desires ease for you and He desires not hardship for you...”, al-Qasimī quotes al-Sha’bī who remarks that when there are differences of opinion between two things, the easiest and the nearest of the two is the right thing and should be upheld.⁴⁸

The Prophet (peace be upon him) in the ḥadīth “Indeed the best religion is the easiest one, indeed the best religion is the easiest one.” repeatedly emphasizes the ease in the religion. The ḥadīth also shows the link between the ease and moderation as the Prophet has used the word *khayr* (best) in the ḥadīth which is one of compulsory characteristics of moderation.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have adopted ease or flexibility as a method in his life. An example of such a practice is highlighted in a Tradition which states: “Narrated Ā’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her): Whenever the Prophet was given an option between two things, he used to select the easier of the two as long as it was not sinful; but if it was sinful, he would remain far from it.”⁴⁹

The term *raf’ al-ḥaraj* (removal of hardship), in verses, *al-Ḥajj*: 78, *al-Mā'idah*: 6, *al-Tawbah*: 91, *al-Aḥzāb*: 38 and *al-Nūr*: 61, are evidence to the phenomenon that Allah almighty always considers man’s nature and abilities, removes hardship from the Muslim community and does not impose it on man in enforcing legal rulings.

In addition to the emphasis of the Qur’ān on the significance of the concept of ease, and removal of hardship the Prophetic literature also contains traditions in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) had warned Muslims not to be extremists.

One such example is: Narrated Abū Hurairah: The Prophet said, “Religion is very easy and whoever overburdens himself in his religion will not be able to continue in that way. So, you should not be extremists, but try to be near to perfection and receive the good things that you will be rewarded and gain strength by worshipping in the mornings, afternoons and during the last hours of the nights.”⁵⁰

Between or the Middle (*al-Bayniyyah*):

Al-bayniyyah or to maintain equilibrium ‘between two limits’ is an essential characteristic of *wasatiyyah* and the word *wasṭ* itself is described in the Arabic dictionaries as synonym to ‘*bayn*’ (between).

The word *bayniyyah* is defined as to be between or in the middle whether it is apparent or implied that means to be moderate in all affairs, and keep away oneself from extreme practices and statements. Imām Ibn al-Athīr mentions that every good manner has two extreme and bad sides. For example, generosity, a good and moderate behavior, comes between two bad behaviors; on one side stinginess and on other side overspending. Braveness, another good and moderate behavior, comes between two bad behaviors on one side cowardice and on other side carelessness.⁵¹ Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā explains that increasing a thing more than what is required in anything is immoderation or excessiveness (*ifrāt*) and decreasing is negligence or laxity (*tafrīt*). Everything which is immoderation or excessiveness or

⁴⁷ *Lisān al-Arab*, s.v. “al-Uṣr.”

⁴⁸ Muḥammad Jamāluddīn al-Qāsimī, *Maḥāsīn al-Tawīl* (al-Maktaba al-Shamīlah V. 3.61).

⁴⁹ *Al-Bukhārī*, 6: 2491, [6404].

⁵⁰ *Al-Bukhārī*, 1: 23, [39].

⁵¹ Muḥammad al-Jazārī Ibn al-Athīr, *Jamī’ al-Usūl fī Aḥādīth al-Rasūl*, edis. Abdul Qādir al-Arnawūt (Beirut: Dar al-Bayān, 1969), 1: 318, [101]. *Al-Maktabah al-Shamīlah*, V. 3.61.

negligence or laxity is evil and blameworthy. The best is the middle between two things or matters or limits, i.e. intermediate between two things.⁵²

Abdullāh al-Muḥsin al-Turkī propounds that moderation refers to the ‘middle.’ Likewise, it is obvious that moderation is to maintain balance between the religion and the world, between revelation and reason, between the needs of the body and the needs of the soul, and between meta-physical knowledge and physical knowledge. Indeed, moderation came to be known with this meaning in Islamic creed, thought, laws, worship and propagation and others.⁵³

Prioritising (al-Awlawiyyah):

One of the important features is a mechanism of priorities, the knowledge of which of the injunctions and the deeds takes precedence over the other. It is the concept of taking into account place and temporal context of the commandments of Sharī’ah and activities and to establish a priority mechanism in sync with the times. In simpler words, the religious obligations and duties differ from one another in their degree of performance, some of them have priority over the others and thus, they must be performed first. Likewise, the injunctions have different stances; there is the required, the obligatory, the banned, the forbidden and the desirable, the preferred (*rājih*), the referred (*marjūh*), the most excellent (*fāḍil*) and the less excellent (*mafdūl*) etc. For this reason, it is needed to understand these priorities in order to be able to put each deed and each obligation in its appropriate position, to relate deeds to their adequate stances and to keep one’s self away from immoderation and negligence. That is how the mechanism of priorities is an essential part of the moderation.

Allah almighty says: “Do you consider the giving of water to pilgrims and the maintaining of the Sacred Mosque as equal to believing in Allah and the Last Day, and striving in Allah's cause? They are not equal in Allah's sight, and Allah does not guide the evil doers. Those who believe and have emigrated and have striven in Allah's cause, with their wealth and their lives, are higher in rank in the sight of Allah, and those are the successful.”⁵⁴ These verses assert that the value and the position of the one who fights in Allah's cause are higher and weightier than those of the devotee of service in the Sacred Mosque (Mecca).

The prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “Faith is more than seventy qualities: The highest one is to confess that there is no god worthy of worship but Allah, and the lowest is to remove all what may cause harm in the street, and modesty is one of the qualities of faith.”⁵⁵

The companions (may Allah be pleased with them) strived for working according to the priorities, and this was apparent mainly in their lot of questions about the highest positions and degrees of deeds in order to act accordingly.

Abū Hurayra reported that the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was asked about the best of deeds, he said: “To believe in Allah and His Messengers.” It was said: Then what? The prophet said: “To fight in the cause of Allah.” It was said: And then what? He replied: “An accepted pilgrimage.”⁵⁶

⁵² Rashīd Riḍā, Tafsīr al-Manār (Cairo: al-Hai’ al-Misriyyah al-‘Āmmah lī al-Kitāb, 1990), 2: 4. Al-Maktabah al-Shamilah, V. 3.61.

⁵³ Abdullāh ibn Abdul Muḥsin Al-Turkī, *Al-Ummah al-wasaṭ wa al-minhāj al-Nabawī fī al-da’wah ilā Allāh*, (Riyāḍ: Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Call and Guidance, 1418 AH), 29.

⁵⁴ At-Tawbah, 10: 19-20.

⁵⁵ Muslim, 1: 63, [35]; al-Bukhārī, 1: 12, [9].

⁵⁶ Muslim, 1: 88, [83]; al-Bukhārī, 1: 18, [26].

Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd said: I asked the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): "What is the most desired deed for Allah?" He said: "Performing prayers in their times." I said: "Then what?" He said: "Obeying one's parents." I said: "Then what?" He said: "Fighting in the cause of Allah."⁵⁷

Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawī, a distinguished scholar of the contemporary Muslim World, who does not have only expertise in the Fiqh of Priorities but he is also the first who feel the necessity to make this topic a regular science and an independent subject. He has discussed this doctrine in many of his books calling it '*Fiqh Marātib al-A'māl*' (Fiqh or Science of Phases of Acts). Later he developed this doctrine in a more comprehensive way and wrote a huge book, namely *Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt* (Fiqh of priorities). He writes in this book that the upset and the disorder in the scale of priorities are well noticed nowadays in the Muslim World.

People pay much more importance to the supererogatory worships than the obligatory ones, and to the individual worships over the collective or the social ones. They also show interest in the subsidiary matters and neglect the principle ones. This immoderation and imbalance lead to the waste of time and energies, create excessive and neglectful behavior among the Muslim Ummah.⁵⁸

Conclusion

So, all the above mentioned features are basic and integral parts of moderation and they are also integrated with one another. These are key instruments in limiting the scope of moderation and they not only denote time and space but are applied on the basis of priorities, balance, straightness, justice and goodness in all aspects of life.

Thus, moderation is multidimensional and covers every aspect of a believer's life. It is physical, psychological, intellectual and spiritual. It is at once a philosophy and a way of life. It is comprehensive, in that it integrates and balances the requisites and delights of this world and the Hereafter, as well as of the physical and spiritual domains of existence. And it is universal, in that it affects the total well-being, firstly of Muslims and then of all people and indeed of all animate and inanimate beings. It is almost synonymous with everything that carries the adjective 'Islamic.'

It is because of this that for many scholars as well as for Sheikh Ibn Usaimen and Abdul Rehman al-Sa'dī, the concept of al-wasatiyyah is nothing but the Qur'an and Sunnah and the laws and deeds which are in accordance with Shariah.⁵⁹

This is moderation in the true sense and is articulated and demonstrated by classical and contemporary Muslim scholars, thinkers, and intellectuals in their religious discourses while explaining Allah's message and Prophetic teachings.

⁵⁷ Muslim, 1: 89, [85].

⁵⁸ Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawī, *Fiqh al-Awlawiyyāt*, trans. Gulzada Sherpawo, (New Delhi: Manshūrāt Publishers and Distributors, 2012), 31-45.

⁵⁹ Abdul Rehman ibn Nasir al-Sa'dī, *al-Qawa'id al-Hassān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān*, (al-Maktabah al-Shamilah, V.3.61), 68.

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